



Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forest Plan Revision Frequently Asked Questions



What is a Forest Plan? A Forest Plan translates national laws, regulations and policies into guidance for natural resource activities on a national forest. It is a roadmap and tool for reaching a collective vision for the future. The Forest Plan is a living, flexible document and can be adjusted (amended) to a variety of changing conditions over time.

What does a Forest Plan do?

- It sets forest wide goals and objectives for managing Forest lands
- It establishes direction that guide how management activities will be carried out
- It prescribes what uses are allowed and where they may occur
- It describes where timber harvesting may occur and sets the upper limits on timber sales
- It allocates land to various uses
- It sets monitoring and evaluation requirements

What is Forest Plan revision? It is a process of reviewing, updating, and improving the existing Forest Plan (Land and Resource Management Plan)

What are the expected outcomes of Forest Plan revision?

- Updated, improved Forest Plans which provide for healthy ecosystems, sustainable management practices
- Build strong partnerships and collaborative relationships which continue into the implementation of the new Forest Plan
- Improved information base for decision making
- Improved techniques, plans and more efficient implementation of monitoring and evaluation

What is an improved Forest Plan? A Forest Plan is responsive to people's needs, implementable over a range of budget levels, easily understood and usable by both natural resource managers and the public, and realistic and adaptable to change.

Why does the Forest Service revise the Forest Plan? Each national forest revises their Forest Plan every 10-15 years according to the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) which was enacted by Congress in 1976. NFMA provides a process to help the Forest Service determine how we will provide for multiple use.

What are some other reasons to revise the Forest Plan? Forest management concepts change, for example ecosystem management. Opportunities for change have surfaced over the life of the current plan and people's expectations change.

Who makes the final decisions? The Forest Service will make the final decision on a revised forest plan. Under the 1982 planning regulations, the Regional Forester is responsible for this decision.

For more information about Forest Plan revision please visit our web site at
www.fs.fed.us/r9/gmfl/nepa_planning/plan_revision.htm
or contact Mike Dockry at 607-546-4470.



Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forest Plan Revision Frequently Asked Questions



What are the criteria on which these decisions will be based? Decisions are based on federal law, public input, resource assessments, and political realities. The Forest Service will create a specific set of decision criteria for evaluating the revised plan before drafting alternatives.

What decisions can be made at the local/forest level and which are dictated by national policies and mandates? Decisions are made by what the Forest Service calls Line Officers. Line Officers include District Rangers, Forest Supervisors, Regional Foresters, and the Chief of the Forest Service. Depending on the scope of the decision to be made, the appropriate Line Officer makes the decision. For example, a District Ranger can make a trail location decision, a Forest Supervisor makes decisions on Forest Plan amendments, and the Chief makes National Policy decisions. Decisions should be consistent with national policies and mandates whether a District ranger or the Chief makes it. All decisions made under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) are made with some form of public involvement.

What are these national policies and mandates? National policy and mandates govern how the Forest Service operates and include:

- Federal laws like the National Forest Management Act, Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act, Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act and the National Environmental Policy Act
- Forest Service Manuals and Handbooks. These contain policy guidance for everything the Forest Service does.
- Policy or direction from the Forest Service Washington Office or Forest Service Regional offices is given to National Forests.
- National programs like the National Fire Plan and the Healthy Forests Initiative

What impact can public opinion have? National Forests are public lands and the Forest Service uses public input whenever an official decision is made. Public input is very important to the management of our public lands and the Forest Service actively seeks out public comment on decisions. Additionally, because of our representative form of government, public desires are incorporated into the laws and policy that govern the Forest Service.

What are the various ways for members of the public to express their opinions? Members of the public may let us know how they feel by attending Forest Plan revision meetings, writing letters, sending emails, calling on the phone, or stopping by the office.

How will public/opinion/comment be weighted? Public comments are not weighted or counted. Public involvement is not a vote; it is a tool to help the Forest Service make the best decisions for the management of our public lands. Comments are separated by content and then used by the Forest Service to make decisions.

What is the difference between the formal and informal comment periods, and when will these take place? There are several times during the Forest Plan revision process where federal law requires that the public submit formal written comments to the Forest Service. Formal comment periods occur when Forest Plan revision is started (Notice of Intent to Revise the Forest Plan May 2002) and when there is a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and

For more information about Forest Plan revision please visit our web site at
www.fs.fed.us/r9/gmfl/nepa_planning/plan_revision.htm
or contact Mike Dockry at 607-546-4470.



Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forest Plan Revision Frequently Asked Questions



Draft Forest Plan for public review. The Draft Forest Plan is expected to be ready for public comment in Summer 2004. The informal comment period includes all of the time between the project initiation and the Draft EIS. During the informal comment period the Forest Service is holding public meetings, fieldtrips, and educational forums. People are encouraged to provide input to the Forest service by participating in Plan Revision activities, writing letters, sending emails, calling on the phone, or stopping by the office. We are currently in the informal comment period.

What are standards and goals, and how do these differ? A goal is defined as a concise statement that describes a desired condition to be achieved sometime in the future. It is normally expressed in broad terms and is timeless. Goals serve as a blueprint for the Forest Plan and will lay the groundwork for the rest of the Plan. An example is, "Maintain long-term soil productivity". Standards are specific direction given in the Forest Plan, the do's and don'ts. An example of a standard is, "no camping is allowed within 50 feet of a stream or water body".

What are management areas and what impact does their designation have on work on the ground? Federal law requires the Forest Service to have a Forest Plan for National Forests. Federal regulation requires the Forest Service to break up each National Forest into Management Areas and include that information in the Forest Plan. Management Areas are like zoning areas that outline the emphasis of each zone and what can and can't be done within the zone. For example, the Finger Lakes National Forest has a Management Area that emphasizes grassland for wildlife and another Management Area that emphasizes grassland for cattle grazing. The Forest Plan outlines what can and can't be done in each Management Area and how they achieve the Finger Lakes National Forest goals and objectives.

What role does the "15 Year Retrospective" play in the plan revision process? The 15 Year Retrospective is a document created by the Finger Lakes National Forest staff for use during Forest Plan revision. The document outlines what is contained in the 1987 Forest Plan, it summarizes how the Forest Plan has worked over the last 15 years, it summarizes public issues to be addressed in Forest Plan revision, and it discusses trends the Forest Plan did not anticipate. The document is to be used by the public and Forest Service staff to help explain the issues involved in the complicated Forest Plan revision process.

What are alternatives and why must there be alternatives? Alternatives outline different ways to manage the Finger Lakes National Forest and provide an opportunity for comparison of different management schemes. The Forest Service is currently required to propose an action and alternatives to that action. Then the Forest Service is required to analyze the social, economic, and environmental consequences associated with the action and each alternative to that action. In other words, the Forest Service needs to produce several different Forest Plans and analyze each one before deciding on a final revised Forest Plan. The public will have a chance to comment both formally and informally on the different alternative Forest Plans before the Forest Service makes a final decision.

For more information about Forest Plan revision please visit our web site at
www.fs.fed.us/r9/gmfl/nepa_planning/plan_revision.htm
or contact Mike Dockry at 607-546-4470.